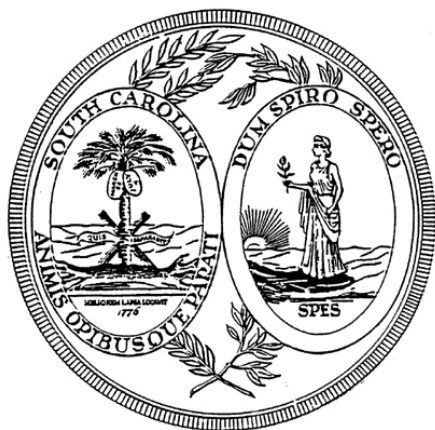


Report of the South Carolina High School Redesign Commission



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Contents

From the State Superintendent.....	iii
South Carolina High School Redesign Commission Members.....	iv
South Carolina High School Redesign Commission Subcommittees	vi
Highlighting Public Education in South Carolina, 1999–2005.....	vii
Chapter I: The Case for Change	
<i>What Does It Take to Live in Today's World?</i>	1
<i>How Are High Schools Doing Now?</i>	2
<i>How Must High Schools Change?</i>	3
Chapter 2: Where South Carolina Stands	
<i>What Have We Accomplished So Far?</i>	6
<i>How Well Are High School Students Learning?</i>	8
<i>How Many Students Graduate, Ready for College and Career?</i>	11
<i>What Are the Risk Factors That Keep Students from Achieving?</i>	13
Chapter 3: Strategies for Change	
The Education and Economic Development Act	16
The Gates Early College High School Initiative	17
The Gateway to College Program.....	18
The <i>Breaking Ranks II</i> Model.....	19
Reducing Risky Behaviors	20
Chapter 4: South Carolina High School Redesign Commission Recommendations	
Overall Recommendations.....	25
Specific Subcommittee Recommendations.....	27
A. Implementing the Education and Economic Development Act.....	27
B. Establishing Early-College Programs.....	29
C. Implementing the <i>Breaking Ranks II</i> Strategies	33
D. Reducing Risky Behaviors	34
Works Cited	37

From the State Superintendent

Dear Friends of Education:

As South Carolina's State Superintendent of Education, I have had during the past seven years the privilege of overseeing the work of an educational system that is improving not only steadily but by leaps and bounds. By almost any measure, South Carolina is at long last moving up in the educational world, thanks to the hard work of thousands of dedicated teachers and administrators who labor in classrooms every day to make a difference in the lives of our children. I have never been prouder or more in awe of the people who do the jobs that may be more difficult than any other but are also certainly the most important to the future of our people and our state.

Yet amid the wealth of good news about South Carolina's schools, one statistic stands out as a clear challenge and a pressing educational priority: in America as a whole, far too many students leave school without completing their education, and far too many are poorly prepared for the requirements of college and career. In a nation where graduation rates are too low, South Carolina's remains among the lowest.

Business leaders nationally and in South Carolina are alarmed by the implications of America's achievement gap for our future prosperity in an intensively competitive world economy. For our state and our nation to remain competitive, high schools must keep more students motivated and engaged in school through to graduation, must prepare them to succeed throughout college, and must equip them with the high-level abilities required by the jobs available in the modern marketplace.

Last year, Carolina First Bank President Mack Whittle and I convened the South Carolina High School Redesign Commission to study the latest research on high school initiatives that promote high achievement and to make recommendations for future state action. Business and community leaders, parents, preK–12 educators, and representatives from higher education spent months evaluating research and visiting high schools to determine the most effective strategies. We learned what high schools can and must do differently and what South Carolina as a state must do to provide structures that contribute to success.

I thank the members of the High School Redesign Commission for their hard work and their dedication to the students of South Carolina. Their effort will guide high schools across the state in creating environments and structures to help all students succeed. It will inform the Department of Education's efforts to provide statewide leadership to transform secondary education. I hope, in addition, that the work of the Commission will guide our state's legislative leaders in making decisions that will support higher achievement in every high school in South Carolina.

Sincerely,
Inez Tenenbaum

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Highlighting Public Education in South Carolina, 1999–2005

NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, all data reported in this document are those of the South Carolina Department of Education.

High School Performance Ratings on State Report Cards, 2005	
33	Number of South Carolina high schools rated <i>unsatisfactory</i> or <i>below average</i>
29	Number of South Carolina high schools rated <i>average</i>
58	Number of South Carolina high schools rated <i>good</i>
72	Number of South Carolina high schools rated <i>excellent</i>

Student College-Going and Persistence Rates	
64%	Percentage of South Carolina high school graduates who immediately enrolled in two-year, four-year, or technical college degree programs in 2004
77%	Percentage of South Carolina high school graduates who returned for their sophomore year at four-year colleges in fall 2001
53%	Percentage of South Carolina high school graduates who graduated from four-year colleges within six years after enrolling as freshmen, calculated for 2004

The Achievement Gap in South Carolina, 2005	
74% Overall	Percentages of eighth graders who met standard in English language arts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85 percent of white students • 62 percent of African American students • 57 percent of Hispanic students • 63 percent of low-income students
66% Overall	Percentages of eighth graders who met standard in math: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 78 percent of white students • 50 percent of African American students • 57 percent of Hispanic students • 63 percent of low-income students

The Achievement Gap in South Carolina, 2005

30% overall	<p>Percentages of eighth graders who scored <i>proficient</i> or <i>advanced</i> in English language arts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41 percent of white students • 15 percent of African American students • 17 percent of Hispanic students • 16 percent of low-income students
23% overall	<p>Percentages of eighth graders who scored <i>proficient</i> or <i>advanced</i> in math:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34 percent of white students • 9 percent of African American students • 14 percent of Hispanic students • 11 percent of low-income students
54% overall	<p>Percentages of AP exams with a score 3 or higher, qualifying for college credit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 58 percent for white students • 27 percent for African American students
19.4 overall	<p>Average composite ACT score among high school seniors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21.3 for white students • 16.5 for African American seniors • 19.8 for students taking core courses recommended by ACT • 18.2 for students not taking core courses recommended by ACT • 22.1 for students who estimated a family income over \$100,000 • 16.6 for students who estimated family income under \$18,000
993 overall	<p>Average SAT score among high school seniors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1042 for white students • 855 for African American students
72%	<p>Percentage of tenth graders who passed both sections of the high school exit exam on their first attempt</p>
56% overall	<p>Percentages of tenth graders scoring Level 3 or higher on the exit exam in English language arts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 71 percent of white students • 35 percent of African American students • 44 percent of Hispanic students • 36 percent of low-income students
47% overall	<p>Percentages of tenth graders scoring Level 3 or higher on the exit exam in math:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 62 percent of white students • 26 percent of African American students • 36 percent of Hispanic students • 29 percent of low-income students
75%	<p>Percentages of high school students who graduated in 2005:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 82 percent of white students • 67 percent of African American students • 66 percent of Hispanic students

South Carolina High School Student Completion and Dropout Rates, 1990–2002		
Year	Completion Rate	Dropout Rate
1990	64.8%	3.3%
1991	68.9%	3.2 %
1992	69.5%	2.9%
1993	70.2%	3.0%
1994	69.6%	3.0%
1995	69.0%	3.1%
1996	67.9%	2.9%
1997	67.3%	2.7%
1998	66.9%	2.7%
1999	66.9%	2.7%
2000	66.4%	3.2%
2001	64.0%	3.3%
2002	66.8%	3.3%

NOTE: The **completion rate** is calculated as the percentage of students receiving a diploma who were enrolled in the eighth grade five years earlier. The **dropout rate** is calculated as the percentage of students leaving high school without completing a program of study or transferring to another institution.

CHAPTER 1

The Case for Change

What Does It Take to Live in Today's World?

"The world is flat". . . it's time to wake up and prepare ourselves for this flat world, because others already are, and there is no time to waste.

—Thomas L. Friedman
Pulitzer Prize–Winning Columnist

High schools have to change.

Across America, there is a growing awareness that in race for position in an increasingly competitive global economy, the United States is at risk of falling behind. Countries such as India and China, with a wealth of innovative competitors and literally millions of highly educated and energetic workers, have been ushered onto the world's economic stage by the explosive technological advances of the past two decades, which make it possible to deliver intellectual work from anywhere, anytime. Today, global knowledge work is up for grabs, and America's economic advantage is disappearing. "The playing field is being leveled' . . . the world is flat" (Friedman 2005).

And America is not ready. Nationally, we have begun to realize that while the world has changed around us, America's high schools have remained largely the same. Instead of rising to the challenge of the new economy—an economy based on knowledge, information, innovation—we have continued preparing the vast majority of today's students for the world of yesterday. It is a world that no longer exists.

Consider these facts that illustrate the profound economic changes of the past half-century. Fifty years ago, 20 percent of America's jobs were professional, another 20 percent were skilled, and 60 percent were unskilled, available to dropouts or workers with only a high school diploma. Today, agricultural and manufacturing jobs, so long an economic mainstay, are dwindling, replaced by technology-oriented, knowledge-based jobs that require better skills and higher levels of competency. Only 15 percent of jobs in the modern marketplace are available to unskilled workers. A full 65 percent require not just some skill, but the same advanced thinking and writing abilities that are emphasized in a college preparatory curriculum. Most require not just a high school diploma but some postsecondary education (Murnane and Levy 1996, vii).

Meanwhile, secondary and postsecondary education in most of America much as it has for the past fifty years. Students proceed along the same comfortably established tracks that have existed for decades, with a minority of students, mostly white and affluent, completing a rigorous college preparatory curriculum and going on to college—and an even smaller minority completing two- or four-year degrees. The remaining students follow general or vocational tracks in high school, generally with less rigorous courses. And far too many drop out of high school altogether.

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates, whose education foundation is at the forefront of the movement to reform the high school experience, has described America's education gap as "an economic disaster" (Gates 2005). It is also an individual and societal crisis. Research shows that students without the skills needed for the modern marketplace face an increasingly uncertain future. In today's economy, a worker with a high school diploma makes around 55 percent of what a college graduate earns. High school dropouts fare even worse, making less than half what a college graduate earns (U.S. Department of Labor 2004). High school dropouts are also more than twice as likely as college graduates to become and to remain unemployed ("More Education" 2004), and they are many times more likely to go to prison (Harlow 2003).

Clearly, America can no longer afford the educational practices of the past—educating a third of our students well, with an eye toward higher education, and educating the rest moderately well or hardly at all, with an eye toward minimally skilled jobs and few intellectual demands. For the United States to remain competitive in the world today, for our citizens to live prosperous and productive lives, all of our students must leave high school with the problem-solving skills and critical-thinking abilities they need to succeed in college and in the new economy. Accomplishing that goal means dramatically changing what we do in high schools and how we do it.

How Are High Schools Doing Now?

When I compare our high schools to what I see when I'm traveling abroad, I am terrified for our work force of tomorrow. In the international competition to have the biggest and best supply of knowledge workers, America is falling behind.

—Bill Gates
Chairman, Microsoft Corporation

Nationally, for every 100 students entering the American educational pipeline,

- 68 will complete high school within four years,
- 40 will enroll in college,
- 27 will return to college in the fall following their freshman year, and
- 18 will complete a bachelor's degree within six years or an associate's degree within three years (National Center for Public Policy 2004a).

At a time when every American student needs more and better education than ever before, statistics like these tell us that our nation is in crisis. Too few students are completing high school—the minimum requirement for a decent job and a living wage. Too few students are continuing on to college—an increasing necessity for productive employment. And fewer still have been equipped with the skills they need to persevere in college and succeed in the workplace.

A host of studies have concluded that students are leaving American high schools poorly prepared for the challenges of college and the workplace. One such study found that nearly 75 percent of employers consider the skills of public school graduates to be only "fair" or "poor" in spelling, grammar, and writing and that more than 60 percent of employers consider the skills of public school graduates to be only "fair" or "poor" in basic math (Johnson and Duffet 2002). ACT, Inc., producer of the ACT Assessment, reported that only 22 percent of 1.2 million

American students who took the test in 2004 met the benchmarks demonstrating readiness for college course work in English, mathematics, and science (ACT 2004, 3). “Our nation is in a readiness crisis,” ACT declared (22).

Colleges, too, report a gap between high school preparation and the skills needed to succeed. Estimates are that nearly 30 percent of graduates entering two- and four-year colleges immediately take remedial courses in English or math and that more than 50 percent take remedial courses at some point during their college careers. The need for remediation is not just costly to colleges and individuals; it contributes to an alarming attrition rate among first-year college students. One in four freshmen at four-year colleges and one in two freshmen at two-year colleges fail to return after the first year. Among students who require remediation, a full 65 percent fail to persist through to college graduation (Adelman 1998).

How Must High Schools Change?

The best place to start is by talking to a cross-section of students: top students, dropouts, and recent graduates. Surprisingly, you’re likely to hear the same thing from each group: No one cared about me, school was boring, and nothing made sense. In other words, anonymity, irrelevance, and incoherence.

—Tom Vander Ark
Executive Director for Education
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The task facing South Carolina’s high schools is to keep more students in school through graduation, to graduate them with the knowledge and skills that employers and colleges expect, and to ensure that they all have the rigorous preparation that will equip them for a lifetime of learning and productive, rewarding work. Accomplishing that task will require three central objectives: expanding and accelerating opportunities for students who are actively engaged in their education, fully engaging students who are just muddling through school, and recovering students who are so far behind and disengaged that they are at risk of dropping out.

Important new research conducted on behalf of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation sheds light on the reasons why many students drop out of school prior to graduation and illustrates the challenges facing today’s high schools. Published in the report *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* (Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morrison 2006), the findings of the Gates study are that while some high school students drop out because of “academic challenges,” the majority of dropouts are students who could have succeeded in school. Nearly half of the study’s survey respondents said they dropped out because their classes were boring and they felt disengaged from school. More than two-thirds cited a lack of motivation or inspiration to work hard. Many said they had left for personal reasons, including the need to work or to take care of children or other family members.

Many researchers judge the design of the large, comprehensive traditional high school to be ill suited to addressing the diverse motivations, needs, and circumstances of high school youths. Hilary Pennington, an education researcher for the national organization Jobs for the Future, summarizes the high school challenge this way:

This so-called “system” has to serve, among others, ninth graders reading below the sixth-grade level and needing accelerated literacy acquisition, low-performing youth taking general track courses that don’t prepare them for college or work, “average” students . . . needing a way to get into college and onto career paths, students who desire advanced technical education, and students of all income groups ready for more advanced academic challenges. It is unrealistic and impractical to presume that one kind of institution can serve the different needs of all young people well. (Pennington 2002)

Reform advocates recognize that there is no “one size fits all” model for creating effective high schools. Virtually all researchers, however, agree that high schools must become much more personalized environments, aware of and able to address the academic needs and personal interests and aspirations of each individual student. Most echo the theme sounded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation describing three essential elements for effective high school reform: the new three Rs of secondary education—“Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships.”

Building Rigor

New research from the United States Department of Education published in *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School through College* confirms earlier research demonstrating that academic rigor in high school is essential in encouraging students to complete postsecondary degrees. “The academic intensity of the student’s high school curriculum still counts more than anything else in precollegiate history in providing momentum toward completing a bachelor’s degree,” the study reports. “Unfortunately, not all high schools present adequate opportunity-to-learn, and some groups of students are excluded more than others” (U.S. Department of Education 2006, xviii).

Building rigor into the high school experience means rejecting the outdated notion that only the brightest students can achieve at high levels and reorganizing schools to promote rigorous preparation for *every* student:

- **High expectations:** Schools must create a culture in which all students are expected to achieve at levels traditionally set for only a few.
- **High academic standards:** Academic standards should clearly define the knowledge and skills students need in order to be successful in college and career and should be aligned with college and workplace requirements.
- **Rigorous course work:** Schools must ensure that all students take a rigorous course of study in core areas (English, mathematics, and science) rather than creating courses with varying levels of difficulty. Course content should be aligned with state standards.
- **Personalized support:** Schools should give students the time and attention they need to succeed in rigorous course work.
- **Varied approaches:** Schools should recognize that students learn in different ways and should make room for varied approaches while holding standards and assessment constant.

Building Relevance

Building relevance means creating a high school curriculum that is meaningful to students and tied to real-world knowledge and skills. Students are more engaged in learning when they have the ability to choose a curriculum that fits their interests and when they understand how the concepts and ideas they learn in school apply to their everyday lives and future plans. Relevant learning aligns what students do in school with what they plan to do in life and allows them to see the connection.

Building Relationships

Research confirms what common sense suggests: students do better when they are known, valued, and contributing members of a learning community that provides personalized and sustained support and guidance. As the Gates Foundation's Tom Vander Ark has asserted, "Large comprehensive high schools have two fatal flaws—they are large and comprehensive. Large factory schools render teachers and students anonymous and anonymity is the enemy of community and learning" ("Remarks" 2001).

Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform—the guidebook for education reform published in 2004 by the National Association of Secondary School Principals—puts the matter this way: "Debate will continue into the foreseeable future about the ideal school size and ideal class size; however, few would argue with the premise that improving the quantity and quality of interactions between students and teachers is a good idea. Moreover, one might ask, 'How many parents would contend that their son or daughter is receiving *too much* attention from teachers to address academic challenges?'" (*Breaking Ranks II* 2004, 8).

In discussing the concept of "personalization," *Breaking Ranks II* cites the definition of the term formulated by Brown University researchers on the basis of their field work and put forth by John H. Clarke in his book *Changing Systems to Personalize Learning*: "the research team defined personalization as a learning process in which schools help students assess their own talents and aspirations, plan a pathway toward their own purposes, work cooperatively with others on challenging tasks, maintain a record of their explorations, and demonstrate their learning against clear standards in a wide variety of media, all with the close support of adult mentors and guides" (*Breaking Ranks II*, 67; Clarke 2003, 14–15).

Research shows, according to as *Breaking Ranks II*, that personalization serves two of secondary education's most pressing needs. The first is getting *all* students to school—a goal that means increasing attendance, reducing dropout rates, and decreasing disruptive behavior. The second is engaging students in learning—a task that is more easily and effectively accomplished when teachers and other school staff know what individual students are interested in, how particular students learn, and what social and personal challenges they are encountering that may distract them from learning (69).

CHAPTER 2

Where South Carolina Stands

Contrary to widespread perception in South Carolina, the quality of student performance in the state is typically on par with the U.S. average, and rapidly improving. The principal issue is the quantity of students successfully passing through the system.

—The Monitor Group, Inc.
McLean, Virginia

South Carolina has made enormous strides over the past decade in improving education, earning national accolades and raising performance to the national average on many indicators of student achievement. Still, as is the case nationally, far too many of South Carolina's students leave school without earning a high school degree, too many are poorly prepared for the world beyond high school, and too many fail to persist in college long enough to earn a postsecondary degree.

Currently in South Carolina, 189 traditional high schools, 8 charter schools, and 81 alternative schools are serving more than 192,000 students in grades nine through twelve. Fifty-five percent of the state's high school students are white, 40 percent are African American, 2 percent are Hispanic, 1 percent are Asian, and .25 percent are American Indian. Around 42 percent of these students qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch. Nearly 13 percent are classified as having special needs, and 9.8 percent are older than is usual for their grade level. Around 6 percent qualify for gifted and talented programs.

South Carolina's high schools come in a wide range of sizes, from just under 200 students to more than 3,100. Over two-thirds of all secondary schools in South Carolina have a poverty index higher than 50 percent, including 48 high schools with poverty indexes over 80 percent.

The state's high schools employ 12,241 full-time teachers. A slight majority of high school teachers (52 percent) have advanced degrees, and 89.5 percent are "highly qualified" under No Child Left Behind guidelines. Fewer than 9 percent of teachers at the high school level are employed through emergency or provisional certificates.

What Have We Accomplished So Far?

South Carolina has worked aggressively in recent years to address its formidable educational challenges, increasing academic rigor and improving achievement dramatically at all grade levels including high school. The state began its reform effort by establishing substantive academic standards for all subject areas and grade levels, creating a rigorous assessment system, and setting a standard for student proficiency that is widely considered to be among the toughest in the nation. Accompanying these changes is the stringent statewide school and district accountability system established in 1998, which also is frequently cited as a national model.

South Carolina's requirements for high school graduation are among the most rigorous in the nation. We are one of only six states that require students to complete 24 units of Carnegie credit to earn a high school diploma, and one of only five that require both 24 units and successful completion of a high school exit examination. Only five states, including South Carolina, require all students to complete 4 units in mathematics prior to receiving a high school diploma (Achieve 2004, 11). Other South Carolina graduation requirements include 4 units in English language arts, 3 units in science, 1 unit of U.S. History and Constitution, ½ unit in economics, ½ unit of U.S. Government, 1 additional social studies unit, 1 physical education or Junior ROTC unit, 1 unit in computer science, and 1 unit in foreign language or career and technology education.

South Carolina has administered a high school exit examination since 1986. In 2003, the state implemented the HSAP (High School Assessment Program), which replaced the existing exit examination as a new, more challenging assessment aligned with state academic standards. In addition to the exit examination, high school students are required by the Education Accountability Act (EAA) to complete end-of-course examinations in five gateway courses: Algebra 1/Mathematics for the Technologies 2, English 1, Physical Science, Biology 1/Applied Biology 2, and U.S. History and Constitution. End-of-course assessments comprise 20 percent of a student's final grade in each benchmark course.

South Carolina has long emphasized the need for all students to take a rigorous course of study during their high school years. In addition to rigorous high school graduation requirements, the state has made a concerted effort to encourage participation in demanding college preparatory courses, Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and honors courses. The state requires all secondary schools that include grades eleven or twelve to offer AP courses.

Reform efforts have also focused intensively on enriching, as well as adding rigor to, the career and technology education curriculum. In 1992, with grant funding from the United States Department of Education, South Carolina eliminated the "general track" and implemented Tech Prep—a systemic career and technology education reform effort built around comprehensive career guidance, the integration of rigorous and challenging academic and occupational education, and the close collaboration of secondary and postsecondary institutions. In 1994, Tech Prep was expanded to include school-to-work transition initiatives such as youth apprenticeships, mentoring, cooperative education, shadowing, internships, and service learning to help students bridge the gap between what they learn in school and what they need to know to be successful in the workplace.

The Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA) of 2005 further sharpens South Carolina's focus on developing the skills students need for success in the twenty-first-century workplace. The product of an intensive four-year study of workplace needs, the EEDA personalizes high school course work to match each student's career interests, provides intensive guidance and counseling for all students, enhances opportunities for real-world learning experiences, and creates structures to ease the student's transition from high school to college or career.

How Well Are High School Students Learning?

As a result of the comprehensive education reforms of the past ten years, student achievement in South Carolina is improving at one of the fastest rates in the nation, by any measure. Since 1998, when the EAA was approved, student scores on the state Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT), the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the high school exit examination, the ACT (American College Test), the SAT, and AP examinations have improved uniformly, at times dramatically among all demographic subgroups. School performance ratings under state and federal accountability statutes have also improved substantially.

Yet despite these significant gains, statistics show that too many of South Carolina's students fail to meet the state's demanding proficiency standards in core academic areas. Gains on the SAT, the indicator most visible to the public, are impressive, but South Carolina continues to trail other states. Student scores on the ACT are approaching but have not yet reached the national average.

More alarmingly, all indicators of student performance point to a wide achievement gap between white students and other demographic groups, including African American students, Hispanic students, and students whose family incomes qualify them for free- or reduced-price meals.

Eighth-Grade PACT

Results from the state's PACT assessment demonstrate that South Carolina students today are significantly better prepared for high school than they were in 1999, when the PACT was first administered. The percentage of eighth-grade students scoring *basic* or above in mathematics increased from 51 percent in 1999 to 66 percent in 2005, a gain of 15 points. In English language arts, the percentage of students scoring *basic* or above improved from 63 percent in 1999 to 75 percent in 2005.

Despite a proficiency standard higher than that in almost any other state, the percentage of South Carolina students scoring *proficient* or *advanced* on the PACT also has increased over the past seven years. In 2005, 23 percent of eighth graders were *proficient* or *advanced* in math, compared with 15 percent in 1999. The percentage of eighth graders scoring *proficient* or *advanced* in English language arts increased from 22 percent in 1999 to 30 percent last year.

Students from minority groups and poor families have improved their performance on the PACT substantially since its first administration. However, PACT statistics show a significant discrepancy between the scores of minority children and those of their white peers. In math, only 50 percent of African American eighth graders met standard in 2005 with a score of *basic* or above, and only 9 percent scored *proficient* or *advanced*, compared with 78 percent of white students scoring *basic* or above and 34 percent scoring *proficient* or *advanced*. Among Hispanic children, only 55 percent met standard, with 14 percent scoring *proficient* or *advanced*. Among poor students, only 54 percent met standard, and only 11 percent scored *proficient* or above. In English language arts, 62 percent of African American eighth graders, 57 percent of Hispanic eighth graders, and 63 percent of low-income eighth graders met standard in 2005, compared with 85 percent of white students.

Eighth-Grade NAEP

South Carolina's eighth-grade students have made steady and impressive progress on the NAEP, the assessment required by the federal government for all states and widely considered the best measure to compare educational performance among states. South Carolina's eighth graders showed the greatest gains in the nation on the math portion of the NAEP assessment between 1996 and 2003 (Education Trust 2004, 2).

In 2005, South Carolina's eighth graders scored an average of 281 on the NAEP math assessment, three points higher than the national average. South Carolina ranked 20th among the 50 states. In reading, South Carolina's eighth graders earned an average score of 257 in 2005 compared to a national average of 260, ranking the state 39th in the nation.

High School Exit Exam

South Carolina students began taking the HSAP, the state's revised high school exit exam, in 2004. Students take the exam for the first time in the tenth grade and retake it as necessary in the eleventh and twelfth grades. Of the HSAP's four achievement levels, students must score at Level 2 or higher, in both English language arts and mathematics, to earn a high school diploma.

Of the over 50,000 tenth-grade students who took the exit exam in 2005, 72 percent passed both sections, down slightly from the 76 percent who passed the exam in 2004. Ninety-three percent of white students, 77 percent of African American students, and 77 percent of Hispanic students passed the English language arts section on the first attempt with a Level 2 or higher. In math, 87 percent of white students, 61 percent of African American students, and 69 percent of Hispanic students passed on their first attempt.

Scores at Level 3 or higher on the exit exam are considered *proficient* under the state's federal No Child Left Behind plan. In English, 56 percent of tenth graders scored Level 3 or 4, including 71 percent of white students, 35 percent of African American students, 44 percent of Hispanic students, and 36 percent of students eligible for free- or reduced-price meals. In math, 47 percent of tenth graders scored Level 3 or higher, including 62 percent of white students, 26 percent of African American students, 36 percent of Hispanic students, and 29 percent of low-income students.

SAT and ACT College Entrance Examinations

South Carolina's high school students have sharply improved their performance on the SAT and ACT college entrance examinations over the past ten years.

On the SAT, South Carolina has maintained the top five-year improvement rating in the nation for the past four years, gaining 27 points since 2000 while the nation has gained only 9. South Carolina's progress has narrowed the gap between the state average and the national average from 62 points in 1999 to just 35 points last year. In 2005, South Carolina's seniors scored an average of 499 on the math section of the SAT, compared to a national average of 520, and 494 on the verbal section, compared to a national average of 508.

South Carolina seniors have also steadily improved their scores on the ACT despite increasing their participation rate by 53 percent over the past five years. In 2000, 10,797 students participated in the ACT, earning a composite score of 19.3. In 2005, 13,867 students took the ACT, earning a composite score of 19.4. (The ACT considers any change larger than 0.05 of a point statistically significant; 0.1 of a point on the ACT is comparable to 4 points on the SAT.) The national average decreased 0.1 of a point over the same period, ending at 20.9 in 2005.

As on the PACT, African American students have improved their SAT and ACT scores significantly but still lag behind white students. On the SAT, African American seniors increased their scores by 13 points in a single year to earn a composite average of 855 in 2005, but their average score still trails that of white students by nearly 200 points. African American students received an average score of 16.5 on the ACT compared with an average of 21.3 for white students.

Course-taking choices have had a significant impact on student scores on both the SAT and ACT. Students who took the core courses recommended by the ACT scored an average of 19.8, while students who did not take the recommended courses scored an average of 18.2. On the SAT, students who took the courses recommended by the College Board as adequate preparation for college scored an average of 1013 in 2005, 68 points higher than the scores of students who had not taken the recommended courses.

AP Performance

The number of high school students taking AP exams for college credit, as well as the number of exams attempted, has risen substantially in South Carolina since 2000. Despite the increase in the number of exams taken, the percentage of exams with scores of 3 or higher, which generally qualify for college credit, has remained about the same.

In 2000, 9,130 South Carolina high school students took 14,560 AP exams, scoring 3 or higher on 55 percent of exams. In 2005, 12,313 of the state's students took 20,479 exams, a 40 percent increase, and earned scores from 3 to 5 on 54 percent of the AP exams taken. Nationally, 58 percent of AP exams taken by public school students had scores of 3 or higher.

African American students also have increased both participation rates and scores on AP exams. In 2000, 1,402 African American students took 1,939 AP exams, earning scores from 3 to 5 on 24 percent of exams. In 2005, 1,702 African American students took 2,447 exams and earned scores from 3 to 5 on 27 percent of exams, equal to the national average for African American students.

End-of-Course Examinations

South Carolina began administering end-of-course examinations, required by the EAA, in 2002–03, beginning with Algebra 1/Mathematics for the Technologies 2. English 1, Physical Science, and Biology 1/Applied Biology 2 were given for the first time in 2003–04. The end-of-course assessment in U.S. History and Constitution will be administered for the first time in 2006–07.

A total of 58,043 students took the Algebra 1/Mathematics for the Technologies assessment in 2004, earning an average score of 79.4. The grade distribution was as follows: A = 6.5 percent, B = 16.2 percent, C = 25.3 percent, D = 21.4 percent, and F = 20.6 percent.

High School Performance

Under South Carolina's landmark EAA, all schools in the state are measured each year on a battery of indicators of student achievement, receiving both an absolute rating and an improvement rating. For high schools, the absolute rating is based on longitudinal performance on the high school exit exam, the percentage of seniors qualifying for LIFE scholarships to a four-year institution, high school exit exam passage rate for the first attempt, and graduation rate. The improvement rating is based on the progress of cohorts of students toward attaining and/or maintaining higher levels of performance on measures of student success from year to year, using the same measures as in the absolute rating. Schools receive one of five ratings based on these measures: *unsatisfactory*, *below average*, *average*, *good*, and *excellent*.

In general, South Carolina's high schools have made good progress in moving from *unsatisfactory* and *below average* to *average*, *good*, and *excellent* in the five years that school and district report cards have been compiled. In 2001, 32 South Carolina high schools were rated as *unsatisfactory*. By 2005, the number of *unsatisfactory* schools was reduced to 16. The number of schools rated *average* increased from 21 to 29 between 2001 and 2005, and the number rated *excellent* increased from 39 to 72.

Perhaps not surprisingly, poverty remains an important predictor of school performance. Of 33 schools with absolute performance ratings of *unsatisfactory* or *below average* in 2005, 26 had poverty indexes above 80 percent. Only 18 percent of schools with poverty indexes higher than 80 percent had absolute ratings of *good* or *excellent* on state report cards.

How Many Students Graduate, Ready for College and Career?

High school graduation rates are among the most confusing education statistics because there are multiple ways to evaluate the data and no nationally accepted definition of what belongs in the calculation. Some methods examine the percentage of ninth graders who receive a diploma four years later. Some evaluate eighth-grade completion rates. Some include General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalency diploma recipients in the graduation rate calculation while others exclude them.

The variation in approaches to calculating graduation rates has resulted in a number of different published estimates of South Carolina's high school completion rate within the past few years. Figures reported by independent groups include the following:

49 percent:	National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (National Center for Public Policy 2004b)
50.7 percent	Urban Institute (Swanson 2004, 13)
56.3 percent	National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy (Miao and Haney 2004, 67)
59.7 percent	National Center for Education Statistics (Seastrom et al. 2005, 5)

Methods of calculating graduation rates also vary widely from state to state, making reliable comparisons impossible. For example, according to an Education Trust report, New Mexico

defines its graduation rate as the percentage of twelfth graders who go on to graduate, ignoring students who may have left school in the ninth, tenth, or eleventh grades. And North Carolina calculates its rate as the percentage of graduates who received a diploma in four years or less, excluding dropouts altogether from the calculation (Hall 2005, 6).

The State Department of Education (SDE) has traditionally reported completion rates for South Carolina as the number of high school completers in relation to the number of students enrolled in eighth grade five years earlier. In 2003, the state began calculating graduation rates in accordance with No Child Left Behind Act guidelines, as the percentage of all ninth-grade students who earn a diploma in four years or less. South Carolina also reports an annual dropout rate, defined as the proportion of students who leave high school without completing a program of study or transferring to another school or institution.

High school completion and annual dropout rates have remained relatively stable in South Carolina over the past decade. Still, by virtually any measure, completion rates in the state are among the lowest in the nation. In 1990, 64.8 percent of students enrolled in eighth grade five years previously successfully completed high school. In 2002, the most year completion rates were calculated, 66.8 percent of students completed high school. South Carolina's annual dropout rate has ranged from a low of 2.7 percent to a high of 3.3 percent over that same period.

Under the No Child Left Behind guidelines, graduation rates calculated for South Carolina were 78 percent in 2003, 77.3 percent in 2004, and 75.4 percent in 2005. As in the rest of the nation, graduation rates are highest for white students (82.5 percent in 2004, 81.6 percent in 2005) and substantially lower for African American students (69.8 percent in 2004, 66.7 percent in 2005) and Hispanic students (68.6 percent in 2004, 65.6 percent in 2005).

A growing number of South Carolina's high school graduates recognize the value of postsecondary education. According to the 2005 analysis by the national education research group Achieve, Inc., South Carolina leads the nation in improving college-going rates (Achieve 2005, 7).

In 1992, only 43 percent of the state's high school graduates immediately enrolled in postsecondary institutions. In 2004, 64 percent of the 36,112 high school completers went on to college, 41 percent at four-year colleges, 3.7 percent at two-year colleges, and 19.4 percent in a technical college degree program. Sixteen percent of 2004 high school graduates went directly into the workforce, and 3.9 percent enlisted in the armed forces.

Yet while more of South Carolina's graduates are attending college, and the quality of their academic preparation has increased substantially over the past decade, education statistics still strongly suggest that the state must do more to ensure that graduates are ready for the rigors of college. South Carolina's technical colleges, which provide remedial education as needed for college-bound students, estimate that 34 percent of students entering technical colleges and universities have to take one or more remedial courses. Further, although nearly two-thirds of high school graduates go on to two- or four-year colleges, less than half have taken an advanced math course (Precalculus, Calculus, or an AP math course), and only 39 percent have taken an advanced science course (Physics, Biology 2, Chemistry 2, or an AP science course). Only 13 percent of graduates have completed an AP course in English.

South Carolina's performance on college entrance examinations, while improving, confirms the need for stronger academic preparation. According to the ACT, only 63 percent of students who take the exam are enrolled in the core courses recommended as adequate preparation for

college, including four years or more of English; three years or more of social science; three years or more of natural science; and three years or more of math, including Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, and one-half year of Trigonometry, Calculus, or other courses. Student scores on the ACT also generally remain below the benchmark scores that, according to ACT analyses, give students a 50 percent chance or better of obtaining a B in college courses.

SAT analyses yield similar results. Of the 19,529 students who took the SAT in 2005, 25 percent had not completed the college preparatory course work recommended by the College Board, including at least four years of English and three years each of mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences/history.

Like completion rates, South Carolina's college retention and graduation rates have remained relatively stable over the past ten years but mirror the alarming national attrition rate. In 2004, 77 percent of the state's high school graduates who enrolled immediately in four-year colleges returned for their sophomore year, slightly better than the national average, but only 53 percent of college entrants graduated from four-year institutions within six years (National Center for Public Policy 2004c, 10).

What Are the Risk Factors That Keep Students from Achieving?

South Carolina is a state with many social and economic challenges, historically and currently, that constitute risk factors influencing high school completion. Evaluating a range of problems that measure the condition of children in the state, South Carolina Kids Count states in the introduction to its Web site (http://www.sckidscount.org/kc_intro01.html) its findings that one-quarter of the South Carolina's children are at "severe risk" and another one-quarter are at "moderate risk" of "becoming unskilled, disconnected, and unproductive adults."

Poverty rates in South Carolina are high. In 1999, 20 percent of children under the age of five—10.1 percent of white children and 35.8 percent of African American children—lived in poverty. In that same year, nearly 18 percent of children ages six through seventeen—8.6 percent of white children and 30.7 percent of African American children—lived in families with incomes below the poverty level (S.C. Kids Count 2005b). South Carolina Kids Count reports that in rural areas such as Allendale, Bamberg, Dillon, Marion, and Williamsburg counties, child poverty rates were as high as 48 percent in 1999 (S.C. Kids Count 2005a).

Poor parenting skills and unstable family or home situations also disadvantage many South Carolina children. More than 31 percent of the state's children live in families with only one parent. (This percentage is calculated on the basis of Kids Count data [S.C. Kids Count 2005b]: "Increasing numbers of children live in single-parent families. In 2000, 273,880 children lived with only one parent. This was 31.3% of all children, up from 25.1% in 1990.") Births to single mothers have increased steadily in the state. In 2002, 40 percent of all births were to single mothers, while nearly 14 percent of births were to teenage mothers. That same year, nearly 21 percent of the state's births were to mothers of all ages who had not completed the twelfth grade (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2006).

Educational attainment in South Carolina is generally low. According to the 2000 United States census, only around two in ten South Carolinians have completed college. Twenty-four percent do not have a high school diploma, including 7.6 percent who have less than a ninth-grade education. The disadvantages of poverty, family instability, and academic underachievement lead to a host of risk behaviors that keep students from successfully completing their education,

including violence and crime, sexual activity and pregnancy, alcohol and other drug abuse, and mental health impairment.

Violence and Crime

In 2003–04, 27,328 individual juvenile offenders in South Carolina were referred to the solicitor for delinquency. Of referrals to family court, 8.8 percent were for violent and serious crimes while 10.6 percent were for status offenses, including truancy, running away, and incorrigibility (S.C. Budget and Control 2004a, table 21). Fifteen percent of offenders were age twelve or younger, 30.9 percent were age thirteen or fourteen, and 54 percent were age fifteen or older. A total of 1,977 juveniles were committed to Department of Juvenile Justice custody and placed in residential programs (S.C. Department of Juvenile Justice 2004, 4).

Between 1993 and 2003, the number of youths referred to the solicitor increased by 29 percent (S.C. Department of Juvenile Justice 2003, 22). Truancy—considered an early warning sign of delinquent behavior, social isolation, and educational failure (Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent 2001, 2)—constituted the second most common juvenile offense in South Carolina in 2002–03 (S.C. Department of Juvenile Justice 2003, 4).

Juvenile offenders of all varieties, including truants, come disproportionately from single-parent, minority, and low-income homes. Nearly 30 percent of juveniles referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice were from families with incomes under \$10,000, and another 35 percent were from homes with family incomes between \$10,000 and \$19,000. Only 19.1 percent of delinquents lived with both natural parents, while 53.7 percent lived in single-parent households, 23.8 percent lived with other relatives, and 3.4 percent lived in other situations including parent plus step-parent (S.C. Department of Juvenile Justice 2004, 24).

Sexual Activity and Pregnancy

In 2003, more than 50 percent of South Carolina students surveyed through the Centers for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported that they had already engaged in sexual intercourse. Twenty-five percent of female and 33 percent of male twelfth graders reported having had intercourse with four or more partners. In 2003, 2,567 of South Carolina's births were to teen mothers, and 93.1 percent of those births were to unmarried women (S.C. Kids Count 2005b). Nationally, fewer than one-third of teen mothers ever finish high school (National Campaign 2003).

Alcohol and Other Drug Use

Adolescent alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use continues to be a problem for South Carolina's youths. South Carolina Kids Count cites data from the South Carolina Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS) survey of risk behaviors among middle and high school students in 2001–02: Thirty-seven percent of high school youths reported having used alcohol within the past thirty days, 25 percent reported that they typically smoke cigarettes, and 20 percent reported using drugs. Seventy-five percent of high school students feel that beer is easy to get, 65 percent believe that marijuana is easy to get, 71 percent feel there is no great risk in drinking two drinks per day, and more than half feel there is no great risk in drinking five drinks in a weekend (S.C. Kids Count 2005b). A total of 1,588 adolescent drug arrests were made in South Carolina in 2003 (S.C. Budget and Control 2004a, table 9). DAODAS reports that in 2005, more than 18,518 adolescents needed substance abuse intervention and/or treatment in South Carolina, yet only 8,851 received treatment, leaving 47.8 percent in need of services but not receiving them (DAODAS 2005, 1). White males and white females in the state tend to

use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs more than African American males and females do (S.C. Kids Count 2005b).

Mental Health Impairment

In its online discussion under the heading “Emotional and Behavioral Disorders,” South Carolina Kids Count explains that when calculated on the basis of a federal formula for estimate prevalence, state data reveal that in 2003, South Carolina had over 62,000 seriously emotionally disturbed nine- to seventeen-year-olds with substantial functional impairment and that over 41,000 of them experience extreme functional impairment during the course of a year. Conduct disorders, attention deficit, depression, and anxiety disorders were the most prevalent (S.C. Kids Count 2005b). Forty-two percent of all admissions to the South Carolina Department of Mental Health in fiscal year 2004 were for children under the age of seventeen (this percentage is calculated on the basis of data reported in the *South Carolina. Statistical Abstract 2004*: 17,813 admissions of persons ages of 0–17, out of a state total of 42,231 [S.C. Budget and Control 2004b, table 13]).

CHAPTER 3

Strategies for Change

Our high schools must be “reinvented,” not reformed. . . . the task is to create multiple pathways to and through the second year of college, not to reform the “one size fits all” comprehensive high school.

—Hilary Pennington
Cofounder, Jobs for the Future

To determine what South Carolina needs to do to improve student achievement at the secondary level, the High School Redesign Commission evaluated the potential of the EEDA to accomplish the goals of high school reform and recommended implementation strategies to ensure its success. The Commission also evaluated three specific strategies—the *Breaking Ranks II* model, the Gateway to College program, and the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI)—that have proven effective nationally. Finally, the Commission examined risky behaviors that disrupt learning for many of South Carolina’s high school students and recommended ways that schools can help prevent these behaviors or mitigate their effects on students’ educational attainment.

The Education and Economic Development Act

Approved by the South Carolina General Assembly in 2005, the EEDA is an important step forward for South Carolina in its effort to address the three *Rs*—Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships—that are seen by researchers as key to transforming high schools into places that prepare students effectively for today’s economy.

The EEDA lays the groundwork for a system of public education based on the concept of “personal pathways to success.” The “pathways” system tailors the high school experience to fit the individual and sets up for every student a seamless transition into life after graduation, whether his or her pathway leads to a two-year college, to a four-year college or university, to military service, or directly into the workplace. Under the EEDA, high academic standards are combined with intensive counseling and opportunities for students to build real-life working skills that are directly related to their individual aspirations.

The EEDA organizes the high school curriculum into sixteen clusters of study reflecting different sets of occupations: agriculture, food, and natural resources; architecture and construction; arts, audio-video technology, and communications; business, management, and administration; education and training; finance; health science; hospitality and tourism; human services; information technology; law, public safety, and security; manufacturing; government and public administration; marketing, sales, and service; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and transportation, distribution, and logistics (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-59-50(A)).

The “pathways” system provides for programs of career awareness and exploration beginning in elementary grades. In the eighth grade, students, their parents or guardians, and skilled counselors begin meeting to create each student’s individual graduation plan (IGP), outlining personal education and career strategies. IGPs, which are revisited at least once a year, specify

each student's choice of cluster and major, postsecondary goals, high school course work, and out-of-class learning experiences, among other elements. The system also enables students to replace some general high school elective courses with courses specifically geared toward particular areas of career interest. In addition, partnerships with businesses and local institutions are set up to give students opportunities for hands-on working experience in the field of their choice, connecting essential academic learning with real-world job skills that make learning relevant to students and improve their chances for career success.

The EEDA recognizes that most students will need further schooling after they graduate from high school and specifically addresses the goal of preparing students “to successfully transition into . . . postsecondary education” (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-59-140). The Act calls for articulation agreements among high schools, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges to ensure a seamless transition and authorizes dual credit agreements allowing students to earn college credit for equivalent courses taken in high school (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-59-210).

To ensure the effective implementation of these goals, the EEDA mandates several supporting initiatives:

- **High Schools That Work:** By the 2009–10 school year, all South Carolina high schools must reorganize along the *High Schools That Work* model or a similar model approved by the SDE to ensure that students are held to rigorous academic standards and are given opportunities for out-of-classroom learning (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-59-130).
- **Individual attention for students:** High schools will be required to achieve a student-to-guidance personnel ratio of 300:1. (The term “guidance personnel” refers to certified school guidance counselors as well as to career specialists.) Students at risk of dropping out will be identified early and models will be developed to help these students graduate (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-59-100 (A)).
- **Regional education centers:** Regional education centers will provide career planning services for students and adults, professional development for educators, and workforce education programs (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-59-180).

The EEDA will be implemented under the guidance of the Education and Economic Development Coordinating Council, with appointees representing the business and education communities.

The Gates Early College High School Initiative

The ECHSI focuses on encouraging high school students to advance to a college degree by compressing the years to a postsecondary degree. ECHSI high schools combine high school and college, allowing students to earn an associate's degree or two years of college credit toward a baccalaureate degree while still in high school.

The ECHSI is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, whose goal is to establish over one hundred seventy ECHSI schools in the United States by 2008. The initiative is designed to make higher education more accessible, affordable, and attractive to students who might not otherwise persevere through college and is based on the belief that all students—average, underachieving, and well prepared—can be motivated to higher educational attainment by challenge, not remediation, and by the opportunity to move into free college courses while in high school.

Although the ECHSI recognizes that high schools need to develop individual visions that are based on community resources and needs, it describes a number of attributes that define early-college high school programs in general. Among these shared characteristics are the following:

- Students earn an associate's degree or two years of credit toward a baccalaureate degree while in high school.
- Students proceed to college-level courses through mastery and competence, not "seat time."
- The years to a postsecondary degree are compressed.
- College awareness and academic preparation begins in middle grades.
- Schools create a common focus on key goals and mission.
- Schools provide small, personalized learning environments.
- Schools promote respect and responsibility among and between students and faculty.
- Schools provide time for staff collaboration and include parents and the community in an education partnership.
- Technology is used as a tool for designing and delivering engaging and imaginative curricula.

The core principles as well as other information about the ECHSI are accessible online at <http://www.earlycolleges.org/>.

The Gateway to College Program

Gateway to College—an early-college program designed specifically for students at risk of dropping out of high school—allows students simultaneously to remediate and to accelerate their academic achievement in a college environment. Targeting students who have not been successful in a traditional high school environment, Gateway to College provides comprehensive support services and specialized courses enabling students to pursue their high school diploma while earning postsecondary credentials.

Gateway to College is based on the model pioneered by Oregon's Portland Community College, a national partner in the ECHSI. In the Gateway to College program, students are grouped into cohorts and given intensive instruction in foundation courses such as mathematics, English, and reading. Cohort students also take a career development class to help focus their academic goals and a college skills and survival class to learn how to take effective notes, study for tests, and so on, so that they can build the competence and confidence they need to reach high academic standards.

The program achieves success by combining high academic expectations with intensive, one-on-one advising and support. Resource specialists devoted exclusively to Gateway participants serve as coaches, mentors, and advisors, working with students on issues ranging from transportation to study habits to pathway selection and registering for classes. Credit received through college courses applies to the high school diploma and the college credential.

Tri-County Technical College, in Anderson, South Carolina, was recently selected as a replication site for the Gateway to College program and was awarded a \$300,000 grant to fund the program for the first three years. Tri-County Tech will implement the program in partnership with the school districts of Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens counties. The program will start with fifty students in the fall of 2006 and will serve a total of three hundred students by the fall of 2008.

The above information and further details about the Gateway to College program are available online at <http://www.gatewaytocollege.org/>.

The *Breaking Ranks II* Model

Breaking Ranks II, a document developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in conjunction with the Education Alliance at Brown University, provides a dynamic blueprint for high school reform designed to counter the disengagement from school, school work and community that prevents many high school students from reaching their potential.

Breaking Ranks II puts forth thirty-one specific strategies for change driven by three core principles: first, that the seeds of change are sown through collaborative leadership, professional learning communities, and strategic use of data; second, that high achievement requires a personalized school environment and meaningful relationships between students and caring adults; and third, that curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be rigorous, interactive, and centered around individual student needs and interests.

The seven cornerstone strategies that encompass the three core areas and the thirty-one recommendations are explained in detail in chapter 1 of *Breaking Ranks II*:

Core knowledge: Schools establish “essential learnings” that students should be required to master in order to graduate. The guidebook tells schools to “Devise a process to formulate essential learnings that take into account state standards and the standards set by individual disciplines and the school community. Although state standards are often beyond your control, the process related to identifying the school community’s essential learnings might be similar to the one outlined in *Providing Focus and Direction Through Essential Learnings*” (*Breaking Ranks II* 2004, 7; see Westerberg and Webb 1997). Once essential learnings are established, schools adjust their curriculum and teaching strategies to support those goals. Actions might include focusing on mastery rather than “seat time”; raising the level of academic rigor in all classes; and/or opening honors, AP, and International Baccalaureate classes to all students.

Connections with students: Schools increase the quantity and improve the quality of interactions between students, teachers, and other school personnel by reducing the number of students for whom any adult or group of adults is responsible. Actions to support this strategy might include reducing a large school into smaller units using school-within-a-school or thematic structures, reducing the number of students for which individual teachers are responsible, or “looping” teachers with students so that groups of students and teachers are teamed for more than one year.

Personalized planning: Schools provide a comprehensive advisory program that gives each student frequent and meaningful opportunities to plan and assess academic and social progress with a faculty member. Actions might include specialized transition programs between “feeder” schools and the high school, requiring students to prepare a “Personal Plan for Progress” based on personal aspirations, learning styles, and strengths and weaknesses, and providing opportunities for students to lead discussions about their progress and accomplishments with a “Personal Adult Advocate” in an advisory setting (*Breaking Ranks II* 2004, 10).

Adapting to differences: Teachers use a variety of instructional strategies and assessments to accommodate individual learning styles.

Flexible use of time: School schedules are flexible enough to accommodate teaching strategies that are consistent with the ways students learn most effectively and that allow for effective teacher teaming and lesson planning. Actions include adjusting the length of class periods to allow time for sustained learning, adjusting the length of the school day and school year, and integrating content instruction across the curriculum to allow more time for learning.

Distributed leadership: Schools institute structural leadership changes that allow for meaningful involvement in decision making by students, teachers, family members, and the community and that support effective communication with these groups. Actions include formalizing participation of students, teachers, family, and community members in site-based decision-making teams and offering families significant opportunities to monitor student progress on a regular basis.

Continuous professional development: Schools align comprehensive, ongoing professional development and the individual PLPs (personal learning plans) of staff members with the content knowledge and instructional strategies required to prepare students for graduation.

Reducing Risky Behaviors

Understanding the factors that contribute to delinquency and truancy—and finding effective ways to mitigate their effects—is central to the goal of retaining more students through to graduation and educating them effectively for college and career.

The SDE recognizes truancy as a potential gateway to delinquency and as a warning sign of underlying social or emotional problems that schools can and should work to address. State Board of Education student attendance regulations have been revised to establish clear definitions of truancy and ensure immediate school-based intervention. The SDE has also established the South Carolina Center for Dropout and Truancy Prevention Programs to provide statewide guidance on effective intervention approaches and promote accuracy and consistency in tracking and processing status offenses. The Center developed the Uniform Management Information and Reporting System to improve information on truants and other status offenders and provided school districts with initial training in using the system.

Under South Carolina's new State Board of Education Regulation 43-274, students between the ages of six and seventeen are identified as truant if they accumulate three consecutive or a total of five unlawful absences, and schools are required to develop and implement intervention plans. Students are identified as habitual truants if they are between the ages of twelve and seventeen, fail to comply with intervention plans, and accumulate two or more additional unlawful absences—at which time an initial truancy petition may be filed with the family court. Chronic truants are identified as children between the ages of twelve and seventeen who have been through the school intervention process, have reached the level of habitual truant, have been referred to family court and placed under an order to attend school, and have continued to accumulate unlawful absences.

Regulation 43-274 describes truancy as “primarily an educational issue” and states that “all reasonable, educationally sound, corrective actions should be undertaken by the school district prior to resorting to the juvenile justice system.” Schools are encouraged to identify the individual underlying problems in developing intervention plans, make every reasonable effort to work with parents to resolve the problem, and adopt team intervention approaches where needed, enlisting help from social service agencies, community mental health organizations, substance abuse prevention organizations, and other appropriate resources. Family court

referrals and involvement of the juvenile justice system are recommended only after all other options have failed.

In addition to actions required under state truancy-prevention regulations, schools in South Carolina are developing a number of other strategies to curtail the impact of high-risk behaviors and keep students motivated and engaged in school.

Early Identification and Intervention

Current research demonstrates that early school-based identification and intervention is crucial in reducing high-risk behaviors and preventing students from dropping out. Research by the United States Department of Education (see U.S. Department of Education 1991) and the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Substance Abuse Prevention (see U.S. Department of Health 1991) spanning more than two decades has shown that individualized SAPs (student assistance programs) are among the most effective school-based prevention and early intervention strategies—equally successful with African American, Asian American, Hispanic, Native American, and white educators and students. Under the SAP, teams accept student referrals from school faculty based on academic and behavioral problems and develop intervention strategies that generally result in improved academic scores, better attendance, and fewer disciplinary problems.

Research also confirms that no single school-based intervention strategy implemented in isolation will have a significant effect in reducing high-risk behaviors. Rather, a mix of many different activities operating simultaneously appear to have the most effect—for example, programs focused on social and emotional learning, environmentally-focused interventions, and effective instructional strategies, combined with broader changes to the school environment that signal and reinforce appropriate behavior (Wilson, Gottfredson, and Najaka 2001).

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) at Clemson University has identified fifteen overlapping and synergistic strategies that have the greatest impact on raising high school graduation rates, successful at all school levels from kindergarten through grade twelve and in rural, suburban, and urban areas:

Basic Core Strategies

- Mentoring/Tutoring
- Service-Learning
- Alternative Schooling
- After-School Opportunities

Early Interventions

- Family Engagement
- Early Childhood Education
- Early Literacy Development

Making the Most of Instruction

- Professional Development
- Active Learning
- Educational Technology
- Individualized Instruction
- Career and Technical Education

School and Community Perspective

- Systemic Renewal
- School-Community Collaboration
- Safe Learning Environments

These strategies were published in 2004 in the book *Helping Students Graduate: A Strategic Approach to Dropout Prevention*, by Jay Smink and Franklin P. Schargel (Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education), and are now online—with overviews, resources, and model programs—on the NDPC/N Web site at <http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/effstrat.htm>.

Transition Support

Students make four major systemic transitions during their academic lifetime: from home to school, from elementary to middle school, from middle to high school, and from high school to college, work, or military service. These transitions affect all students in some way, but for certain students, systemic transitions are especially problematic. Prior problem behaviors, low academic achievement, and low socioeconomic status all are related to unsuccessful transition, making these students far more likely than their peers to leave school before they have graduated. The failure of these students to successfully negotiate the transition from one school to the next may initiate or accelerate a gradual disengagement from school altogether (Anderson et al. 2000).

Schools can increase the likelihood of successful transition by providing adequate preparation and support for students. Efforts to ensure successful transition must be comprehensive and multifaceted, must involve parents, and must address the necessity of creating a sense of community and belonging.

Alternative Education

Meeting the needs of potential dropouts requires schools to provide a variety of options that can lead to graduation. Alternative paths to graduation may be offered through virtual high school, an extended school year, or a credit-recovery program, for example. Other models may include school-within-a-school programs (designed for students needing a separate location within the traditional school for academic or social behavior programs); college-based alternative schools (providing high school credits and operated by public school staff but in a college setting); and summer schools for students to earn remedial or academic credit or to enhance their special interests (NDPC/N 2004).

Separate alternative schools are another option, with programs paying special attention to a student's individual social needs and academic requirements for earning a high school diploma. A review of successful alternative school programs by the National Dropout Prevention Center revealed several consistent profiles: a maximum student-teacher ratio of 10:1, a small student base (not exceeding 250 students), a clearly stated mission and discipline code, a caring faculty with continual staff development, high expectations for student achievement, a flexible school schedule with community involvement and support, and a total commitment to having each student succeed (NDPC/N 2004).

Youth Courts and Accountability

Youth courts are a rapidly expanding alternative to the juvenile justice system and school disciplinary processes for young people who have committed nonviolent offenses (Pearson and Jurich 2005). The goal of the youth court program is to intervene in early antisocial, delinquent, and criminal behaviors to reduce the number of incidents and to prevent the escalation of such behaviors. Under the youth court concept, youth volunteers—who are supervised by adult volunteers—work as bailiffs, clerks, jury, and judges, becoming participatory members of the court in identifying problems and developing solutions for individual, school, and community issues. Dispositions are designed to hold youths accountable for their actions and to help them repair the harm they have caused.

Smaller Learning Communities

Establishing smaller learning communities as components of comprehensive high school improvement plans holds promise for improving academic performance. Smaller schools may have advantages over larger schools, including the ability to create close personal environments in which teachers can work collaboratively with each other and with a small set of students to support learning. Research suggests the following:

- Smaller learning environments are a condition for boosting student achievement (Williams 1990).
- Enrollment size has a positive effect on student attendance rates, the frequency of disciplinary actions, a student's use of alcohol or drugs, a student's sense of school loyalty and satisfaction with school, and a student's sense of self-esteem (Klonsky 1995, Raywid 1995).
- Enrollment size has a stronger effect on learning in schools with large concentrations of poor and minority children (Cotton 1996, 4).
- Smaller schools are safer and more productive because students feel less alienated, more nurtured, and more connected to caring adults, and teachers feel that they have more opportunity to get to know and support their students (Fowler and Wahlberg 1991, Gregory 1992, Stockard and Mayberry 1992, 40–58).

Smaller learning communities also may help ease the transition from middle school to high school.

Preparing Educators to Work with High-Risk Youths

Schools must build the capacity of teachers, administrators, and educational leaders to work effectively with high-risk students, providing knowledge and skills in three specific areas:

Risk factors: The most prevalent pathways to delinquency are predictable, identifiable, and in many cases preventable. Risk factors for delinquent and other problem behaviors can be grouped into three areas: individual, family, and environmental. Youths at risk for delinquency exhibit negative behaviors early in life. They have already had problems in school, and as years pass, they are frequently absent, truant, suspended, or expelled.

A review of the literature on risk factors is provided in *About Risk and Protective Factors* (pages 6–10), a document published in 2004 by the Channing Bete Company and made available online at http://preview.channing-bete.com/CTC/5558OJ_RandP.pdf. In addition, the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center has published its “Risk and Protective Factors for Youth Violence Fact Sheet” online at <http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/risk.asp>.

Protective factors: A sizable body of research shows that strengthening “protective factors”—also referred to as “resilience factors” or “developmental assets” (Constantine, Benard, and Diaz 1999, 4)—can mitigate the potential effects of risk factors for some children. Three broad categories of protective factors—healthy beliefs and clear standards, bonding, and individual characteristics—communicated and modeled by communities and caring adults can promote positive youth development and healthy behaviors when accompanied by risk-reduction strategies (Hawkins, Arthur, and Catalano 1995).

School climate: The environment of a school very strongly affects the quality of learning that takes place there. School climates that communicate high expectations, a sense of community and belonging, and trust and respect for teachers and students create a setting where students feel safe and involved, enabling them to become challenged and engaged learners. A number of interventions can help improve overall school climate, including an emphasis on fairness and respect, an increase in parental involvement, and use of violence prevention curricula. Providing opportunities for students to have meaningful input into creating a positive climate has been shown to be beneficial (Marshall 2000).

CHAPTER 4

South Carolina High School Redesign Commission Recommendations

The South Carolina High School Redesign Commission recommended fifty-five strategies, both general and specific to subcommittee focus, to strengthen the state's high schools.

Overall Recommendations

The five High School Redesign Commission subcommittees had a number of common ideas about the changes needed in South Carolina's high schools. All subcommittees emphasized the need to establish a seamless preK–16 educational system, with close coordination between high schools and postsecondary institutions and greater flexibility for students in moving through an integrated system. Prominent among these recommendations is the Commission's call to eliminate the "seat time" requirements of the outdated Carnegie system and move toward competency-based progression, with dual credit arrangements that enable students to proceed through high school and college at individual rates. Adequate funding for comprehensive high school reform, greater personalization of the high school experience, and extended learning opportunities for students and communities were other themes common among all subcommittees.

1. The General Assembly should establish a permanent preK–16 coordinating council to foster communication and coordination between preK–12 schools and state institutions of higher learning and to oversee integration of standards, articulation of courses, and dual credit arrangements.
2. The SDE and postsecondary institutions should update their methods of data management to enable them to assess preK–16 education as an interrelated system, with individual student progress and outcomes tracked across education sectors.
3. The State Board of Education should eliminate the requirement for completion of 120 hours of instruction to receive Carnegie unit credit and substitute a proficiency-based system that incorporates state assessments such as the HSAP and the End-of-Course Assessment Program, which require students to have the knowledge and skills specified in the state's academic standards.
4. South Carolina should mandate and fund alternative pathways to graduation to assist students who are behind academically and to foster individual progression through high school. Options should include the following:
 - virtual high schools to enhance classroom learning, equalize opportunities among districts, and promote individual progression through school;
 - credit-recovery labs provided during or after the school day to enable students who have fallen behind to complete courses and get back on track; and
 - extended school day or extended school year programs to meet increasing expectations and goals and to ensure that students have opportunities to catch up, keep up, and get ahead with academic course work.

5. South Carolina should mandate and fund a system of dual credit, allowing a three-semester-hour college course to transfer as 1 full unit of Carnegie credit toward a high school diploma.
6. The Legislature should provide adequate funding for comprehensive high school reform, including full funding for implementation of the EEDA.
7. South Carolina should maximize the public investment in school construction and upkeep, accommodate the critical need to upgrade the work skills of the state's adults, and provide extended learning opportunities for students by designing or redesigning all secondary school buildings as community learning centers. These centers should be open in the afternoons and evenings for such activities as adult education classes, computer classes, beginning technical and two-year college courses, AP courses, ESL (English as a second language) programs, seminars, and foreign language courses. All future renovation and construction projects in South Carolina should require school designs to accommodate these needs. All existing secondary schools in communities with low educational levels should be transformed into community learning centers that coordinate their programs with nearby colleges and universities.
8. Professional development should be redesigned to provide additional time for the personal learning and collaboration that are essential to meeting individual student needs:
 - The General Assembly should fund extended educator contracts to allow for collaboration among colleagues and to support ongoing professional development with an emphasis on delivering more rigorous content; creating more personalized instruction; and developing behaviors, knowledge, and skills to inspire and motivate students.
 - Educators should be given support and time to work in vertical teams to strengthen content, instruction, and linkages among middle schools, high schools, and postsecondary institutions.
 - Middle and high schools rated *unsatisfactory*, *below average*, or *average* should have two full-time campus-based instructional coaches, one with experience in the school and one from outside the school.
9. All high school reform efforts should be directed toward improving the quality and quantity of interactions between students, teachers, and other school personnel and should therefore include the reorganization of large high schools into smaller learning communities and a reduction in the number of students that teachers are responsible for.
10. South Carolina should address the critical shortage of qualified principals and teachers by fully funding programs to recruit, train, and retain capable teachers and administrators.

Specific Subcommittee Recommendations

A. Implementing the Education and Economic Development Act

The subcommittee on the EEDA recommended steps to implement three key segments of the Act: the statewide implementation of *High Schools That Work*, the creation of a seamless preK–16 educational system, and the identification of strategies for serving at-risk students. The subcommittee also issued two general recommendations addressing overall implementation of the EEDA.

General Recommendations

Members of the EEDA subcommittee voiced concerns about the Act's stipulation to deliver EEDA services through the twelve-area service delivery structure created by the Workforce Investment Act, noting that these zones combine areas of the state—such as Orangeburg, Barnwell, and Allendale counties and the Pee Dee region—where some of the greatest need exists but also where the lack of transportation makes it difficult for people to take advantage of these services. The subcommittee also felt strongly that to ensure rigor and consistency across career and technology course offerings, schools should emphasize offerings within career clusters that have associated national certifications and should adopt other standardized assessments, such as WorkKeys, in the remaining content areas.

1. The services of the Education and Economic Development Coordinating Council should be delivered through sixteen regional centers aligned with the service areas of the state's technical colleges rather than with the twelve Workforce Investment Act service delivery areas so that access to these services is more evenly distributed.
2. Schools should ensure that the career clusters to receive primary attention first are those that have associated national certifications and should examine other standardized assessments as an option in career areas for which there are currently no national tests or certifications.

Implementing *High Schools That Work* Statewide

Currently, schools participating in the *High Schools That Work* network receive significant “seed money” to establish the site, provide professional development focused on the initiative's ten key practices, and support the intensive technical assistance provided by the SDE on a three-year cycle. *High Schools That Work* schools also are required to participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in alternate years. EEDA timelines require all South Carolina high schools to adopt *High Schools That Work*—or a similar, approved whole-school reform initiative—by 2009–10. A minimum of thirty new sites will be added to the network each year, beginning in 2005–06, to meet the deadline specified in the legislation.

3. The General Assembly should provide adequate funding to support effective statewide implementation of High Schools That Work or similar whole-school reform initiatives, including funding for site development, staff education, technical assistance, and school participation in alternate-year NAEP assessment.

4. The SDE should reduce costs and hold manpower requirements to a manageable level by providing technical assistance to *High Schools That Work* sites on a five-year cycle, rather than a three-year one. Based on results of pilot projects in Charleston County and Oconee County, the SDE may consider combining Southern Regional Education Board technical assistance visits with Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation visits to further reduce costs and manpower requirements of implementing the *High Schools That Work* initiative.

Strategies for Serving At-Risk Students

The EEDA subcommittee felt strongly that South Carolina should support a stepped-up effort to recover students whose need for academic remediation puts them at risk of dropping out of high school. The subcommittee specifically recommended state support for credit-recovery programs, including both software programs and online learning delivered through a virtual high school. Another of their suggestions was for schools to evaluate and consider replicating the Star Academy program currently under way in Pickens County schools. The Academy, an intensive one-year program of study, targets students between fifteen and sixteen-and-a-half years of age who are disengaged from the learning process and assists them in completing middle school, meeting ninth-grade requirements, and becoming integrated into tenth-grade-level career and technology education programs.

The EEDA subcommittee also felt that schools should take a more active role in easing the transition between high school and postsecondary education, specifically recommending consideration of the Jobs for South Carolina's Graduates program being piloted in fourteen high schools. A federally funded cooperative venture involving the Governor's office, the SDE, the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, and Communities in Schools of South Carolina, Jobs for South Carolina's Graduates currently serves nearly five hundred ninth-grade students considered at risk of dropping out of high school, with the goal of helping these students complete high school and find good jobs after graduation or postsecondary education. Key features of the program include classroom instruction under a trained career specialist, development of employability skills, adult mentoring focused on individual circumstances and needs, sustained advice and support in making career and life decisions, summer employment training in real-world situations, job and postsecondary education placement services, and twelve months of follow-up support after a graduate is placed in a job or postsecondary education.

5. The SDE should make access to remediation and self-paced learning options more uniformly available by purchasing a statewide contract/license or negotiating a uniformly reduced rate for PLATO Learning products or similar software.
6. The SDE should assess the results of the four-year Jobs for South Carolina's Graduates pilot program currently in place in fourteen South Carolina high schools to determine if this model produces results that merit replication at more sites or statewide.
7. The SDE should follow the assessed results of the Star Academy currently under way in Pickens County schools.

Implementing a Seamless PreK–16 Educational System

The EEDA subcommittee had four specific recommendations, in addition to those included in the Commission’s general recommendations, to support development of a seamless preK–16 educational system:

8. Curricula that have established ties to an articulated path at the postsecondary level should be extended to more high schools in the state. One specific example is the pre-engineering program Project Lead the Way, which the University of South Carolina accepts for major-specific course credit among incoming engineering students.
9. Two-year colleges should work closely with the school districts within their service areas to identify and promote clear connections between the studies completed within the high school majors and the degree requirements at the technical college. Where articulation and dual credit enrollment opportunities are already in place, they should be widely and effectively promoted through print and electronic materials in formats that make them readily accessible by parents and students. Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College’s work in this area provides an excellent example since they have developed district-specific guides that connect majors offered in different Orangeburg districts to degree programs at Orangeburg-Calhoun Tech.
10. The General Assembly should provide tuition support for students with IGPs (individual graduation plans) that include courses for which students can earn both high school and postsecondary credit.
11. South Carolina should support greater use of an ACT-based assessment system to coordinate with a student’s IGP goals.

B. Establishing Early-College Programs

Two subcommittees of the High School Redesign Commission—Implementing the Early-College High School Programs and Implementing the Gateway to College Program—considered strategies to increase academic achievement by compressing the time required for a student to earn both a high school diploma and a postsecondary degree.

The subcommittee on implementing early-college high school programs found that early-college strategies can be effective in helping a wide variety of students attain their goals: top-performing students, who may be well prepared for college but find little challenge in high school work; capable but underachieving students, who may look upon education and the world around them as overwhelming; and students from low-income families who are underrepresented in higher education. The subcommittee developed twelve recommendations with specific action steps for districts that decide to implement these strategies. These recommendations address the full range of implementation issues, including mission, governance, articulation agreements with postsecondary institutions, organization and delivery of curriculum and instruction, assessment, guidance and transition programs, parent engagement and education, professional development, transferability of dual credit, funding, marketing, and evaluation of the initiative.

The subcommittee on implementing the Gateway to College program examined the Portland Community College design, which is focused specifically on recovering students who have already left high school or are at risk of dropping out. The subcommittee noted that models like Gateway to College require close partnership with local postsecondary institutions and

neighboring school districts and recommended extensive discussion and research within individual communities to determine whether Gateway to College may be an appropriate strategy. The subcommittee also cautioned that because the program provides intensive help for students who need considerable support, it requires a significant local financial investment.

1. **Mission:** Local districts in collaboration with secondary institutions should create a shared understanding among students, teachers, and administrators of their objectives by formulating a well-articulated mission based on facts about the current state of the high school, the needs of students, and an explicit understanding of the knowledge and skills students need to have in order to meet the standards of today's society and economy. Schools districts should
 - choose people with experience and expertise who are talented and fully committed to bringing about change;
 - establish a list of principles and practices to drive the mission and create the called-for conditions for students; and
 - review policies and regulations and align them with the new mission and actions for early-college high school programs.
2. **Governance:** Local districts in collaboration with secondary institutions should establish a board of advisors with representatives from each of the organizations involved in the local early-college program partnership—business and educational partners, community leaders, policy makers, leaders in state government, and parents. Partners should
 - determine the role and responsibilities of the board—for example, to share expertise, develop ideas, identify funding resources, encourage corporate and higher education partnerships, and make recommendations to the district's board of education regarding budget and finance, curriculum, public relations, marketing, and program development;
 - establish the advisory board's relationship to the district's board of education; and
 - select for the advisory board risk-takers who understand the need to reform high schools.
3. **Articulation agreements:** Letters of agreement, or memorandums of understanding, should be generated to clearly express the conditions of operation to which all parties will agree. These agreements should
 - establish a governance mechanism that crosses the borders between high school and postsecondary education and clearly articulates roles and responsibilities;
 - allow students to obtain dual credit, earning high school credit for college course work and clearly identifying high school courses that meet general education and major requirements for postsecondary degree programs;
 - address college enrollment eligibility requirements including assessing academic readiness without excluding students on the basis of grade level, age, or a single test score and permitting students who have proper support from a high school to move into college-level courses in subject areas for which they meet the criteria or have passed all prerequisite courses; and
 - enable appropriately credentialed high school teachers to teach college-credit courses and allow college faculty to teach high school students.

4. **Organization and delivery of curriculum and instruction:** High schools with early-college programs must add rigor and relevance to the curriculum, blending the secondary and postsecondary curriculum while creating school work that engages students and enables them to learn the skills they need to succeed in the workplace. Schools also must focus on improving instruction and providing students with multiple learning options and varied lengths of time to complete course work. Early-college schools and their partners should
 - develop rigorous college-preparatory content in English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, social studies, and the arts for the ninth- and tenth-grade years;
 - align and redesign dual credit courses;
 - develop research seminars for students to pursue in-depth learning in content areas of interest or anticipated career fields;
 - integrate core units of study with service learning, learning in the community, and cultural and travel experiences to foster development of lifelong learning skills;
 - integrate internships, mentorships, and college and career guidance into the curriculum to foster employability and life skills; and
 - examine exemplary instructional models—such as “The Seven Disciplines for Strengthening Instruction” derived from the work of Harvard University’s Change Leadership Group—in order to define a process and a set of goals to improve instruction and achievement.
5. **Assessment of course work:** The SDE should reexamine curriculum requirements and assessments to ensure that high school course work and postsecondary standards are aligned. Therefore, the SDE should
 - work with postsecondary institutions to define “college ready” standards and to align the state’s academic standards with college standards;
 - work with postsecondary institutions to ensure that career and technical pathways meet standards for postsecondary study and lead to meaningful career opportunities; and
 - create methods of assessment—such as using portfolio and performance assessment practices—that are based on state academic standards and early-college high school curricula and that accommodate diversity of approaches.
6. **Guidance and transition programs:** High schools should establish a guidance and advisement system for students and their parents that develops positive relationships and ensures completion of an accelerated program of study with both an academic and a career/technical concentration. Participating students should work throughout high school with a mentor who will assist them with setting goals and selecting courses and will review their progress and suggest interventions as necessary. Specific steps should include the following:
 - establishing annual meetings among school counselors, mentors, students, and parents beginning in the sixth grade to review career interest inventories, assessments, and other information that may assist students in making career decisions;

- educating middle-grades students, parents, and teachers about achievement levels needed for rigorous high school studies;
 - working with students and parents before the end of the eighth-grade year to select a preferred cluster of study and develop IGPs; and
 - educating high school students, parents, and teachers about achievement levels needed for postsecondary study and high-demand, high-income jobs.
7. **Parent engagement and education:** Since parental engagement, education, and support are essential to ensuring student success, high schools implementing early-college programs should assist parents in developing strategies and skills to support their children in a challenging course of study. Partners should provide activities, seminars, and ongoing coaching for parents, focusing these efforts toward helping parents to be active, productive participants in their children's intellectual and emotional development.
 8. **Professional development for educators:** Professional development for educators involved in early-college programs should focus on promoting a nurturing learning environment that reflects student interests and sets high expectations for students. Efforts should be devoted toward
 - establishing reading groups, peer coaching, and professional portfolios to help teachers develop needed skills and abilities;
 - supporting teachers in practicing and modeling lifelong learning;
 - using research and best practice to enhance teaching and learning; and
 - helping teachers learn to collaborate effectively with business, community, and family partners.
 9. **Transferability of dual credits:** Articulation agreements between postsecondary institutions should allow students to transfer from one postsecondary institution to another the credits they earn through early-college programs. Higher education institutions must accept dual credit high school courses as equivalent to courses currently designated as transferable under existing articulation agreements.
 10. **Funding:** The General Assembly should adopt a funding mechanism for early-college programs based on the principle of no cost to students by combining per-pupil Education Finance Act (EFA) funding, postsecondary per-credit allocations, and state financial aid and incentive dollars. Funding should be provided for high school education, college education, and early-college partnerships:
 - The General Assembly should enact legislation allowing a student to receive EFA funding up to age twenty-one (provided the student is a member of the graduating class) or to receive a portion of the EFA per-pupil allotment, which can follow the student to pay for postsecondary costs.
 - High school students who are taking at least half of their course work in college and are currently enrolled in a college program should remain eligible for state and federal need-based financial aid.

- Two- and four-year institutions should receive FTE (full-time equivalent) allocations for students participating in early-college programs.
 - Four-year institutions should receive the same FTE allocation for students participating in early-college programs as do two-year institutions.
 - Teachers should receive salary supplements for pursuing professional development, providing extended time for student acceleration and support for student learning, and serving as facilitators in summer programs and foreign travel.
 - High schools interested in offering early-college programs should pursue auxiliary funding by establishing educational foundations and seeking corporate assistance.
11. **Marketing:** High schools with early-college programs and their partners should develop long-range public information and marketing plans to promote participation. Elements should include an early-college high school Web site, brochures, media information packets, multimedia presentations for community and civic organizations, and reports on needed revisions to state statutes and regulations disseminated to state and local policy makers.
 12. **Evaluation of early-college high school programs:** Public education and postsecondary institutions should evaluate the effectiveness of early-college high school programs. Elements should include graduation rates, the number of eighth- and ninth-grade course failures, promotion rates from the eighth to the ninth grade and from the ninth to the tenth grade, dropout rates, the number of high school students with individualized graduation plans that include college readiness data, the number of college-level credits earned by high school students and transferred to postsecondary institutions, college retention and on-time completion rates, among other counts.

C. Implementing the *Breaking Ranks II* Strategies

The subcommittee evaluating *Breaking Ranks II*—the guidebook to the whole-school reform model developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in cooperation with Brown University—concluded that the principles and strategies of the *Breaking Ranks* approach would be useful for all high schools in South Carolina. The subcommittee recommended that training in *Breaking Ranks II* strategies be offered to all secondary school principals and leadership teams in South Carolina and encouraged all high schools to adopt the three “touchstones” underlying this approach. The subcommittee offered seven additional recommendations based on the *Breaking Ranks II* model:

1. Schools should establish “essential learnings” that students must master in order to graduate, based on state academic standards, standards set by individual academic disciplines, and standards set by the school community. In revising the state academic standards, the SDE should ensure that standards provide students with a solid academic core. High school educators should be intimately involved in developing the standards.
2. Large schools should improve the quantity and quality of interactions among their students, teachers, and other school personnel by organizing as smaller units and by either reducing or limiting the number of students for whom teachers are responsible.
3. Students should be engaged in a comprehensive advisory program, and the entire faculty should be engaged in meaningful relationships with students.

4. Instruction and assessment should take into account individual student learning styles, characteristics, and needs. Schools should put structures in place that create environments for student-centered, challenging, interactive, and meaningful learning experiences.
5. Administrators should develop school schedules flexible enough to accommodate effective teacher teaming, planning, and giving assistance to students.
6. Schools should adopt leadership structures that allow for meaningful involvement in decision making by students, teachers, family members, and the community and that support effective communication with these groups.
7. Professional development for educators must be comprehensive, ongoing, and aligned with the content knowledge identified by schools as essential learnings and with effective instructional strategies.

D. Reducing Risky Behaviors

The Reducing Risky Behaviors Subcommittee issued fifteen recommendations in three general areas: improving truancy tracking and prevention, expanding and improving dropout prevention initiatives, and building local school and community capacity to meet the challenge of educating high-risk youths.

Truancy Tracking and Prevention

1. South Carolina should ensure the accurate and consistent processing of youths charged with status offenses by establishing a state law or regulation supporting implementation of the Uniform Management Information and Reporting System developed by the SDE's Center for Truancy and Dropout Prevention. The state should ensure that this system coincides with the recommendations of the National Governors Association and fully meets all requirements established by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.
2. The SDE should provide technical assistance to every school district to ensure full implementation of policies and procedures for truancy-intervention planning and reporting. The SDE should provide training for district attendance officers in tracking and reporting truancy data using the Uniform Management Information and Reporting System.
3. Districts should increase the use of student assistance programs to provide prevention, educational, and early intervention services to students who may have substance abuse or mental health issues or may be experiencing problems with school behavior and/or performance. Teams should be created to identify high-risk students, determine appropriate supportive intervention and/or treatment services, and develop protocols for working with existing resources, including school-based mental health services and community-based social service agencies.

Expanding Dropout Prevention Initiatives

4. Students who leave traditional preK–12 programs should be referred to local adult education programs, with the base student cost following the student.

5. South Carolina should conduct a statewide evaluation of alternative school programs to determine enhancements and modifications necessary for improved outcomes. The SDE should provide guidance and direction to districts on effective protocols and best practices for alternative schools to build the state's capacity to serve more students in need of alternative learning opportunities.
6. High schools with high truancy rates as determined by the SDE should establish accountability or youth courts.
7. The state should provide transition specialists to implement the School-to-Work model integrating academic and career-based skills. Transition specialists should monitor and guide students who disengage from the traditional preK–12 program and enroll in adult education, ensure successful high school completion, and assist with postsecondary education, military enrollment, or employment.
8. South Carolina high schools should focus intensively on preventing ninth-grade failure by creating an environment that provides ninth graders the adult support, academic assistance, and life skills they need to succeed:
 - All high schools should create school-within-a-school environments such as those provided through the Freshman Focus and Freshman Academy programs so that students are removed from the larger high school environment and have the opportunity to form close relationships with teachers and mentors.
 - The General Assembly should mandate and fund a teacher-student ratio of 1:15 in core academic courses (English, mathematics, science, and social studies) for ninth-grade students who did not meet state standards in one or more areas assessed on the eighth-grade PACT.
 - All students should be required to complete a semester-long freshman seminar course for Carnegie credit to be tailored by local schools and districts to specific needs. Topics might include study skills, character education, drug and alcohol prevention, gang prevention, workplace/social skills development, and self-esteem building.
 - Schools should provide a one-week orientation for rising ninth graders prior to the beginning of school to acclimate them to the high school and enable them to get to know administrators.
 - High schools and their feeder middle schools should develop transition plans for all high-risk students to facilitate their transition from middle school to high school.
9. All high schools should implement a comprehensive set of proven intervention and treatment strategies based on best practices. Programming could include the following:
 - single-gender leadership development opportunities for at-risk students to build skills and enhance strengths;
 - after-school intramural programs providing academic, social, and athletic opportunities that could help keep at-risk students involved in school;
 - peer mediation programs in schools and communities to assist young people in resolving problems;
 - violence prevention programming; and

- mental health counseling and alcohol and other drug abuse intervention and treatment services.
10. The SDE should study the policies currently in place in twenty-two states enabling high school students eighteen years of age and under to obtain and keep drivers' licenses based on their school attendance record and/or their academic standing. These policies should be evaluated for their effectiveness in reducing the student dropout rate, and recommendations for state action should be made by 2007–08.

Building Local Capacity to Educate High-Risk Youths

11. The SDE should establish a cross-training effort for school resource officers, student assistance teams, faculty members, and community-based social service providers (including the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Social Services, and the Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services) focused on priority high-risk populations, evidence-based life skills curricula, violence and bullying prevention, and strategies to effectively address risk factors.
12. The General Assembly should approve legislation prohibiting status offenders from being incarcerated in Department of Juvenile Justice institutional facilities and should provide recommendations about the number and types of alternative programs needed within local communities.
13. High schools should adequately address school climate in developing comprehensive improvement plans. All schools should assess individual school climate needs and develop a plan that ensures school environments are safe, that students feel respected and heard, and that quality interactions between students and adults are valued.
14. Every school district should conduct, in collaboration with key stakeholders, a needs and resource assessment regarding education of high-risk youths and develop an action plan to respond more effectively to the needs of at-risk youths. Partners should include the departments of Mental Health, Juvenile Justice, Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services, Social Services, Health and Environmental Control, Developmental Disabilities and Special Needs, as well as community-based service providers, victim advocates, the faith community, and law enforcement. The SDE and other agency representatives should provide technical assistance to districts in assessing needs and in planning improvements.
15. Districts should ensure that all schools meet the requirements outlined in state student attendance regulations regarding intervention planning in all cases of unexcused absences.

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